

Going forward and beyond: on the track of a practice turn in supply chain sustainability studies

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Abstract

Purpose – Despite the growing interest in the field of supply chain sustainability (SCS), little exploration of new theories exists. Therefore, this paper aims to introduce practice theories to SCS studies through a practice turn.

Design/methodology/approach – This is a conceptual paper in nature. Hence, based on theoretical arguments, the authors elaborate on how the practice turn can arise in the SCS field.

Findings – The theoretical elaboration is rooted in the understanding that sustainability is not limited to the materiality of environmental and social issues, as often observed. Instead, there is a need to include immaterial, emotional and intangible elements to better comprehend SCS practice. The authors argue that a continuum exists for a practice turn, including practice-based view, practice-based studies and critical practice theory.

Research limitations/implications – The authors provide a research agenda with a comprehensive perspective of understanding the application and implications of practice theories to SCS.

Practical implications – The practice turn in SCS studies can support managers to better understand their practices not only through recognizing explicit activities but also mainly by reflecting on hidden elements that affect their performance.

Social implications – SCS studies can better engage with grand challenges through a practice turn, which helps increase its contribution to solving social problems.

Originality/value – Unlike previous literature, the paper elaborates on how practice theories are powerful in supporting both scholars and practitioners in moving away from an extremely economic focus to genuinely embrace sustainability practice. In doing so, the practice turn appears as an important phase for SCS field maturity.

Keywords Supply chain sustainability, Practice theories, Practice-based studies, Critical research

Paper type Conceptual paper



1. Introduction

Over the past few years, supply chain sustainability (SCS) studies have started a move toward a stronger contribution to societal challenges in the 21st century. For instance, while [Touboulic, McCarthy, & Matthews \(2020\)](#) showed the need to reimagine supply chains to address grand challenges, [Carmagnac, Silva, & Fritz \(2023\)](#) explored reflections on how to adopt sustainable development goals in supply chains. Additionally, [Santos, Silva, & Pereira \(2023\)](#) investigated how knowledge and knowing can support the SCS practice of agriculture, which is often related to climate change. These studies have in common the interest in exploring SCS beyond an excessive focus on economic metrics. Therefore, in this paper, we argue that SCS studies will gradually shift their focus toward sustainability practice when the *practice turn* becomes feasible.

The number of studies using a practice-based perspective has increased; however, the often-used meaning for the term “practice” has followed a taken-for-granted approach without any theoretical questioning ([Silva, Fritz, & El-Garaihy, 2022a](#)). According to [Nicolini \(2012\)](#), there is no unified definition or interpretation of *practice* as a concept. However, we understand that the concept of practice deserves further attention from scholars and practitioners toward the *practice turn* in sustainability studies applied to supply chains. *Practice turn* is a movement in which the practice theories should be used to better understand the concept of sustainability and, at the same time, value material, immaterial, human and nonhuman elements ([Gherardi, 2009a](#)) that are essential in the supply chain. Therefore, this paper aims to debate the contribution of practice to SCS studies.

The literature has already started a conversation between theories of practices (TPs) and SCS. However, while [Carter, Kosmol, & Kaufmann \(2017\)](#) proposed the supply chain practice view with further implications on SCS, [Silva & Figueiredo \(2020\)](#) reflect on the sustainability-practice approach for more responsible supply chains. Nevertheless, SCS studies do not seem to realize the full potential of TPs to generate social impact. Multiple concepts have been explored without a comprehensive focus on a *practice turn*. Among these concepts, we can identify downstream end customer engagement ([Silva, Rodrigues, & Alves, 2022b](#)), organizational power and hypocrisy ([Glover & Touboulic, 2020](#)), supply chain systems ([Lissillour, 2021](#)), sustainability policies ([Malik, Abdallah, Orr, & Chaudhary, 2019](#)) and logistic services ([Lissillour, Fulconis, & Fernandez, 2021a](#), [Lissillour, Fulconis, & Psaraftis, 2021b](#)). These authors mention the need to include the human element, which is often overlooked in supply chain studies. However, there is room for further development.

For a *practice turn*, in which considering what people do is essential, the main proposal of the turn is to develop an effective engagement of humans in repeated actions. However, the *practice turn* also implies to consider other elements. Therefore, unlike traditional theories applied to SCS studies (e.g. transaction cost economics, resource-based view [RBV], institutional theory), the use of TPs provides new contributions to the literature due to their nature. TPs consist of a plural body of theories along a *continuum* of epistemologies. For instance, the study of TPs can move from practice-based view (PBV) ([Bromiley & Rau, 2014](#)), passing through socio-materiality practice theory ([Gherardi, 2001](#); [Schatzki, 2001](#); [Reckwitz, 2002](#)) and reaching Bourdieu’s critical theory of practice ([Lissillour & Bonet Fernandez, 2018](#)). Understanding this plurality can help us to better comprehend the practice.

To realize this conceptual paper, which aims to reflect on how to complete the *practice turn*, we conducted an interactive process to build arguments on how to connect fields through a theory-building approach ([Meredith, 1993](#)). In doing so, we build on how practice theories and SCS studies can exist interchangeably. To this end, we use previous studies to

support our arguments. This paper argues that a *practice turn* is essential to the progress of SCS studies since an exclusive performance-based approach hampers further developments in the field of management (Buchanan & Dawson, 2007; Maes & Van Hootegem, 2022; Schultze & Leidner, 2002; Keegan & Boselie, 2006). Therefore, we provide inputs on how SCS studies could integrate the *practice turn* and benefit from the understanding that practices shape reality and supply chains are formed by them.

We contribute to SCS studies since we demonstrate that supply chains are not limited to companies and managers, but should also consider what happens in between, including the immaterial elements (Carmagnac & Naoui-Outini, 2022; Fritz, Silva, & Touboulic, 2022). Additionally, we show different ways to study practice and suggest a research agenda with a comprehensive perspective of how to understand TPs applied to SCS. This paper argues for an interdisciplinary approach by integrating multiple foci, such as agency, materiality, discourse and a certain critical stance. The paper concludes by outlining the characteristic focus of the practice perspective in the research on supply chain. In line with the recent call for more militant types of study to address the needs and challenges of the students and practitioners of the supply chain (Touboulic et al., 2020; Touboulic & McCarthy, 2020), this paper underlines the critical stance of the TPs, which values the researcher's reflexivity to renew scientific practices.

2. Methodological insights

To elaborate a reflection on the *practice turn* in the field of SCS, we took a conceptual approach. Following Gilson & Goldberg's (2015) view that conceptual papers should go beyond summarizing recent research, "manuscripts should provide an integration of literatures, offer an integrated framework, provide value added, and highlight directions for future inquiry." Hence, we explore three conceptualization stages offered by Skilton (2011) to elaborate on the theory of supply chain management. According to him, to support a new theory reflection, a paper must have clarification, differentiation and illustration. First, clarification refers to providing an overview of the status quo of the extant literature. Hence, as provided in Section 3, we show how SCS is currently linked to practice, which is often broad and a-theoretical (Touboulic & Walker, 2015). Additionally, Section 4 demonstrates how main concepts can be used to go forward and beyond in the current debate, thus properly introducing practice theories to SCS.

In contrast to systematic literature reviews, conceptual papers do not require specific procedures to select which references are used in the theorization. The focus of a conceptual paper is to integrate the literature about a specific topic, suggest new relationships through an integrated framework and thus contribute to current debates in an academic field (Gilson & Goldberg, 2015). Next, the differentiation stage appears to be the main contribution of a conceptual paper because the authors are providing their added value to the literature. This paper combines the two last stages of Skilton (2011) through the research agenda provided in Section 5. In other words, these three stages combined support the conceptualization conducted here.

3. Supply chain sustainability and its relationship with practice

Discussions about SCS have been increasing in the past years because the study of these topics is both timely and significant (Carter & Washispack, 2018; Golicic & Smith, 2013; Pereira, Hendry, Silva, Bossle, & Antonialli, 2023). This is one of the most widespread expressions used globally nowadays. More than creating new concepts and/or definitions; it is necessary to develop the field through a new approach that carries both theoretical and methodological consistency (Carter & Washispack, 2018). This paper contributes to prior

studies that call for a shift from a sustainability-performance to a sustainability-practice approach (Silva & Figueiredo, 2020). Indeed, SCS studies reflect the exclusive performance-based approach, which implies a strong bias toward positivist and hypothetico-deductive research that maintains the status quo (Deetz, 1996). Sustainability as practice implies a dialogic and critical discourse that is typically set aside in literature. Therefore, following Pagell & Wu (2009), we assume SCS practice “as a set of specific managerial activities spread widely throughout the supply chain as repeated actions [to achieve] sustainability, which is rooted in the way of thinking and/or cultural values” (Silva et al., 2022b).

According to Golobic & Smith (2013), the practice of sustainability is an important consideration in business and supply chain management as it can strongly influence companies’ relationships with their key stakeholders. For Beske & Seuring (2014, p. 323), “every company would have the chance to transform their supply chain into a (more) sustainable one.” In fact, as presented by Krause, Vachon, & Klassen (2009), a company is no more sustainable than its supply chain. The same idea is considered by Halldórsson, Kotzab, & Skjøtt-Larsen (2009) whose paper discusses deeply the issues of ownership, responsibility and supply chain strategy and addresses environmental and social issues. According to these authors, the better strategy to evolve these topics is to align both issues for a deeper transformation.

Similarly, Touboulic & Walker (2015, p. 21) argue that “future research efforts could seek to develop our understanding of the implementation process of SSCM by framing it as transformation/change in organizational practice.” For instance, Silva et al. (2022b) conducted a research study with end customers to shed a deeper understanding of their engagement with SCS practices, which generated a bundle of practices. Also, Silva & Figueiredo (2020) have identified a bundle of practices that guide a company to responsible business. They found the time elements as crucial, and the need to consider sustainable development goals. This is aligned with Carter et al. (2017), who claim that SCS is key for introducing a practice perspective in supply chain studies. Despite the emergence of this research stream, there are still limited research efforts to increase our understanding of how to tap into the TPs to evolve where we go as the next steps for the field (Fritz et al., 2022; Silva et al., 2022a).

4. Theories of practice

The existence of a plurality of theories connected with TPs opens the opportunity for the discussion of what kind of epistemologies are connected to them. Therefore, in this article, we argue that multiple epistemologies exist in a *continuum* through three main theories within this *continuum* to ensure a broader understanding of TPs’ impact on SCS studies. It is crucial to emphasize that divergent epistemological positions do not necessarily constitute a division line; rather, they can coexist in the recognition of an epistemological *continuum*, thus reflecting the idiosyncratic character of practice. We acknowledge eventual imprecision in attaching theories to a specific epistemology since our rationale and specific theory-building work can differ.

4.1 Practice-based view

PBV is defined as the positivist approach in TPs’ studies, which is not often the case since positivist research does not deal with specific elements of practice. However, when applied to supply chains, the PBV has not yet well defined its place in the *continuum*. There are many criticisms claiming that PBV is not even a practice theory (Jarzabkowski, Kaplan, Seidl, & Whittington, 2016); however, we assume them as one TP that may be positioned between positivism and postpositivism. The current debate on PBV emerges from strategy

management and reaches supply chain management complementarily to RBV research. For [Carter et al. \(2017\)](#), “PBV focuses on differences in performance among firms across the entire range of performance [...] [and] the explanatory variables in the PBV are practices that are imitable and amenable to transfer across firms, as opposed to [...] RBV.”

According to [Bromiley & Rau \(2014\)](#), “focusing on practices will help us to create specific, actionable advice for managers and other practitioners while continuing to advance our ability to explain firm behavior and the influence of firm behavior on performance.” As indicated by [Bromiley & Rau \(2016\)](#), “performance is not only a more tangible construct than a competitive advantage, it has the advantage of being more readily measurable.” Related to supply chain strategy, the debate should consider the organizational level of analysis as well. Hence, rather than considering only the firm’s resources, capacities or practices ([Carter et al., 2017](#)), it is necessary to observe interactions between these elements.

PBV helps scholars to identify such interactions by showing connections that are not visible from the perspective of other traditional theories such as RBV. This is considered the weak link into TPs for supply chain management since, for [Jarzabkowski et al. \(2016\)](#), there is already the debate of strategy as practice and a new theory is not necessary. According to these authors, PBV is only interested in *what* to do, the practice related to strategy (i.e. strategy as a practice) should also analyze *how* and *who* is involved in the process ([Fritz et al., 2022](#)).

4.2 Practice-based studies: socio-materiality and learning

Practice-based studies (PBS) refers to a body of knowledge that covers multiple theories from organizational studies ([Gherardi, 2009a](#)). For instance, it can refer not only to strategy as practice ([Jarzabkowski et al., 2016](#)) but also to organizational learning ([Gherardi, 2001](#)). One of the main elements of PBS refers to the clear emphasis on socio-materiality ([Schatzki, 2001](#)), that is, in this context practice comprises multiple interconnected elements which include human and nonhuman elements, things and their use, state of emotion and knowledge. Such interconnection can be represented by meanings, skills and materials, which represent the link between individuals and structure ([Gherardi, 2009a](#); [Schatzki, 2006](#)).

The existence of these elements of practices is represented by [Nicolini \(2012\)](#) as a representation of doings and sayings. For this author, we cannot understand the practice based only on one of these features but as a result of its combination. Such a perspective was built following [Schatzki’s \(2006\)](#) arguments for the existence of a bundle of practices. For this author, the elements of practice when interconnected create a new level of relations, leading us to understand the nexus of practice. For instance, to understand SCS the existence of cooperating, improving, changing the logic, understanding and deeming represent a bundle of practice ([Silva & Figueiredo, 2020](#)). If this analysis was developed at a supply chain level, a nexus of practice could emerge from these practices.

There is room to understand PBS in multiple ways, and we need to understand the elements of practice in its details. Meanings, skills and materials should be part of every single research interested in recognizing what is a practice and how multiple practices are connected. However, within this debate, there is also the need to give further attention to learning and knowing to understand the bundle of practices. Indeed, divergences may occur in how individuals, organizations and supply chains learn and share knowledge ([Gherardi, 2001](#)). Since learning is possible by doings and sayings, it is necessary to unfold multiple elements still underexplored. Therefore, there is a need for further details in terms of how the elements of practice support the emergence of bundles of practice and how this is learned in multiple supply chain levels ([Santos et al., 2023](#)).

4.3 Critical perspective: Bourdieu

Bourdieu's TP has been studied extensively and systematically in the field of management (Sieweke, 2014), including organizational studies (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008), information systems (Monod, Lissillour, Köster, & Jiayin, 2023), entrepreneurship (Sklaveniti & Steyaert, 2020), education (Lingard, Sam, & Aspa, 2015), human resources (Vincent, 2016), sports management (Wagner & McLaughlin, 2015), accounting (Baxter & Chua, 2008) and strategic management (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011). The growing corpus of studies based on Bourdieu's sociology is explained by the fact that its "concepts capture the layered, intersubjective, interdependent nature of social phenomena better than the mainstream concepts" (Ozbilgin, Tatli, & Nord, 2005). However, this perspective remains underexplored in the field of supply chain and logistics. Indeed, previous research studies in this field mostly focused on one sole theoretical concept from Bourdieu, namely, social capital (Majumdar & Nishant, 2008; Hung et al., 2014; Min et al., 2008; Prasad et al., 2012) with, to the best of our knowledge, only two references to habitus (Bakker & Kamann, 2007; Bryceson & Ross, 2020). Even though Bourdieu's work cannot be reduced to the mechanism that we will describe in this section, TP can be explained by the interaction of a few interdependent concepts, namely, the field, capital, habitus and nomos.

The *field* is the meta-concept that serves as the basis of any practice-based analysis, which may induce the study of the six other concepts. The TP considers the social world as networks of spaces of competition, struggle and conflict between dominant and dominated. Each of these conflicts takes place in a relatively structured and autonomous field in which actors are positioned depending on their power and interest in the field. In each field, actors all share a common understanding of the rules of the game. A common struggle in fields is for actors to acquire the forms of capital that provide power (Bourdieu, 1997b).

Bourdieu introduced four types of *capital*, namely, economic capital (financial assets, technology, income, time), cultural capital (knowledge, education, professional expertise, etc.), social capital (networks of relationships with significant others that agents can draw on) and symbolic capital (authority and legitimacy, power to set rules and ponder the value of other types of capital, power to classify and nominate). Endowment in the types of capital that matter provides access to the field, power to act and influence upon others. Even though each field can be analyzed through these four forms of capital, some fields in the study of the supply chain can be analyzed via specific types of capital, such as intellectual capital (Mubarik, Bontis, Mubarik, & Mahmood, 2021), relational capital (Petersen, Handfield, Lawson, & Cousins, 2008; Cousins, Handfield, Lawson, & Petersen, 2006) or even supply chain capital (Autry & Griffis, 2008). Even though often not used from a practice perspective, the concept of social capital has given rise to many studies in supply chain and logistics (Johnson et al., 2013).

The *habitus* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) is incorporated durably during the process of socialization in the field. It generates recurrent practices and representations that are coherent with the logic of the field. Nonetheless, the habitus is not a static social conditioning because it is dynamically actualized by the agent on a continual basis (Bourdieu, 1997a). Habitus is an action potential that authorizes and constrains agents. It is the "generative grammar" of the concrete social activity carried out by agents (Bourdieu, 1972/2000, 1980). Practice thus results from a dialectic between the objective social structure expressed in the form of rituals and restrictions, and the structuring structure incorporated in the body in the form of habitus. Lissillour & Bonet Fernandez (2021) have suggested four distinct dimensions for the study of habitus: habitus as constituted by practical tacit knowledge, habitus as composed of social dispositions, habitus as developed through time and habitus as established via social interactions.

The *nomos* is defined by Bourdieu as the tacit “law of perception and practice which is the foundation of consensus on the meaning of the social world [...] the foundation of common sense” (Bourdieu, 1994). Dominant agents struggled to make their worldview the legitimate vision of the field. There are high stakes in this struggle because “if my *nomos* becomes the universal *nomos*, if the world sees the world as I do, then I will be backed up by all those who share my vision” (Bourdieu, 2000). According to Lissillour et al. (2021a, 2021b), the *nomos* in supply chains can be studied according to three dimensions, namely, a normative framework, a legitimate vision and structural divisions.

5. Practice turn: how to practice supply chain sustainability

Following these theoretical elements, we understand the need to ensure the *practice turn* within this epistemology *continuum*. This section reflects on how to move forward in the debate of SCS using TPs. Silva et al. (2022a) added a relevant reflection in terms of targets to study TPs for SCS by considering *what, how, why, by whom* and *context*. These elements are key because they explain previous connections that were not developed by scholars and practitioners (Fritz et al., 2022). To contribute to this debate, we theorize and provide additional research gaps and a research agenda for the three different TPs selected for this article.

5.1 Practice-based view

Bromiley & Rau (2014, p. 1249) define a practice “as a defined activity or set of activities that a variety of firms might execute.” In our research context, this refers to a set of specific managerial actions for sustainability (Silva et al., 2022b). The practice is defined in PBV as the result of a combination of resources toward a targeted performance (see Table 1). This can be directly affected by specific contingency factors, which for Carter et al. (2017) relates to how firms position themselves in the market (i.e. how imitable are their practices). Bromiley & Rau (2014) explain that such contingency factors are connected to the organizational context and the nature of the resources.

As previously explained, PBV has some limitations in explaining practice more critically. Therefore, this theory should be used for those who are interested in having a new theoretical perspective but still not ready to move in the epistemology *continuum*. However, this should be only a starting point. For a researcher of practice, to stay constrained by the elements of PBV is likely to limit the eventual theoretical contributions and practical implications of one’s research. Moreover, from a methodological point of view, PBV implies the use of quantitative methods while comprehending practices requires a diversity of methods, which includes qualitative methods (cf. Bromiley & Rau, 2014). However, PBV is typically criticized for ignoring the nature of practices (Silva et al., 2022a).

5.2 Practice-based studies: socio-materiality and learning

TPs refer to a family of theories (Nicolini, 2012) which includes PBS. Practice is defined in different ways within PBS; however, the main issue to consider is already the move to identify the existence of other elements, such as emotions and knowledge (Schatzki, 2006). We understand practice as a recurrent pattern of action that is carried out by someone who performs it after creating a meaning (Silva & Figueiredo, 2017). In other words, to identify a practice we need to recognize who is carrying, performing and generating meaning of it. This relies on what was already mentioned in terms of materials and skills that are mobilized (Gherardi, 2009b). For PBS, there is no practice without socio-materiality (Carmagnac & Naoui-Outini, 2022). Additionally, we assume that for SCS, learning is an essential element (Santos et al., 2023). Since sustainability is a journey, not a destination

Main concepts	Research topics	Research agenda
<i>Practice-based view</i>		
Nature of resources	Role of intangible resource Bundle of resources	<i>How do intangible resources contribute to create, develop or constrain the spread of SCS practices? To what extent the resources should be analyzed by its singularity to better understand the (lack of) development of SCS practices?</i>
Imitability	To be imitable does not limit the value of a practice	<i>How imitable practices are mobilized differently for SCS across firms and industries? What is the role of the context to define the roots of a resource?</i>
<i>Practice-based studies</i>		
Meanings	Lack of exchange	<i>How to spread sustainability meaning over the supply chain? How to ensure that all supply chain members have the same understanding of sustainability? Can different supply chain levels understand differently and achieve the same sustainability?</i>
Materials	Which materials shape the practice	<i>What kind of materials directly affect the practice? How does immaterial have been used to SCS practice? To what extent does the body of the practitioner influence the practice for SCS?</i>
Skills	How to create skills for all supply chains	<i>Are companies ready to apply sustainability beyond their boundaries? Do we have sustainability beyond first-tier supply chains? How to ensure that all supply chain members apply sustainability knowledge in the same way?</i>
Learning	Learning roots	<i>Does a company learn from whom or what? Can companies share sustainability learning among several levels of the supply chain? Is learning based on sustainability initiatives? Can supply chains be defined as communities of practice?</i>
<i>Critical practice theory</i>		
Habitus	Social conditioning toward sustainability	<i>What habitus facilitates or hinders change toward sustainable change? Can facilitating habitus be transferred from another field? How do practices impede the development of sustainable policies?</i>
Field	The role of diverse stakes and conflicting positions in the implementation of sustainable practices	<i>What conflicting interests generate resistance to change? What stakeholder relationships are involved in the implementation of sustainable policies? What is the relative position of agents, their interests and stakes?</i>
Capital	The role of resource dotation and unbalanced among agents in a supply chain	<i>How is the authority to set sustainable rules constructed? To what extent does a strong social network generate influence in the field? What knowledge/skills generate status and prestige? What type of resources constitute specific forms of power and influence?</i>

(continued)

Table 1.
Research agenda
toward a practice
turn

Main concepts	Research topics	Research agenda
Nomos	The constitution of the taken-for-granted understanding of sustainability within a supply chain	<p><i>How do powerful agents impose the principle of division onto other agents in the field?</i></p> <p><i>What normative framework dominates the field and how has it been imposed and legitimized?</i></p> <p><i>What is the vision that is shared in the field and to whose interest does it serve?</i></p> <p><i>How is the legitimate worldview constructed and instituted by the dominant players?</i></p>

Table 1. Source: Own creation based on our own theorization

(Silva & Figueiredo, 2020), it is necessary to develop learning of how this socio-materiality can be introduced in multiple levels of a supply chain. Table 1 shows some ideas for future research.

The need to understand the socio-materiality is key because the relation between practice and practitioner changes the recurrence of actions, that is, changes the practice. We could also highlight elements of culture as strongly important to understand the practice since practitioners have also experiences that change their perspective of life (Carmagnac & Naoui-Outini, 2022). In terms of SCS, usually we focus on environmental, social and economic elements, but we need to focus on the practice. An example is Silva & Figueiredo (2020) who presented a bundle of practices connected by creating sustainability. For instance, by looking at the social construction and the role of language, PBS seeks to reveal the multivocal nature of the social construction process by pointing at the fragmentation of the narratives and the lack of shared meanings among those involved in sustainable change in supply chains.

A positivist perspective is hardly possible in PBS, thus scholars need to change the epistemological lens. Also, the methods can vary by using others such as ethnography, participant observation, action research or contextual analysis which are adapted in specific ways to the requirements of a practice approach. Despite that, qualitative interviewing is arguably the most common method used by researchers to gather data about the practitioner’s daily routines and their insights into the field of practice and its structure (Silva et al., 2022a). Indeed, the data analysis is typically interpretive to generate a finely-grained understanding of how agents perceive themselves and the contextual factors shaping their actions. There is room for exploring SCS practice under a new perspective different from the extent of the literature.

5.3 Critical perspective: Bourdieu

Bourdieu looks at practices as situated in a specific field and provides conceptual devices to understand the reproduction of these practices (see Table 1). The agents that dominate the field seek to maintain its structure, to maintain the relative positions of agents in the field, their relative endowment in capital and the nomos that is prevalent in the field. The dominant agents will seek to maintain the autonomy of the field to control access to capital and preserve rules in line with their interests. Sustainable practices in the supply chain are thus facilitated by an enabling habitus and by a strong endowment in the types of capital that matter in the specific field. An enabling habitus is developed historically as agents integrate the objective structures of the field. Even in the absence of an enabling habitus and

facilitating conditions in the field, agents can adjust their practices and improvise by bringing capital from other fields to create disruptions. Disruptions then modify the structure of the field, that is the established positions, the value and endowment in capital and the recognized nomos in the field.

Making a supply chain more sustainable implies the participation of different types of actors driven by specific stakes and endowments in capital (Fritz et al., 2022). The concepts mentioned enable researchers to better understand the power structure of the partially autonomous environment in which supply chains emerge. To reflectively objectivize normative constraints, researchers may mobilize the four dimensions of normative pluralism (Lissillour, 2021), namely, the descriptive, injunctive, prescriptive and proscriptive norms which enable and constrain agents in a supply chain. Understanding the taken-for-granted vision that conditions the mindset of agents in a supply chain (e.g. Silva et al., 2022b) is instrumental in conducting research on the social constraints related to the implementation of sustainable decisions. Bourdieu's social theory can be mobilized to a variety of fields, including international supply chain (Lissillour & Bonet Fernandez, 2018), global governance (Lissillour & Bonet Fernandez, 2021), internal supply chain (Lissillour, 2021) and crowdsourcing (Lissillour & Sahut, 2021).

In addition to the economic relations between social groups, this approach emphasizes the prevalence of cultural, social and symbolic dimensions. For instance, Lissillour et al. (2021a, 2021b) explored Bourdieu's critical theory of practice to comprehend governance in the maritime industry and its relations with safety measures. This approach offers a distinct perspective on supply chains and their ecosystem, portraying them as arenas of ongoing political contention and continual conflict. This critical stance seeks to unveil and scrutinize the mechanisms of domination and distorted communication, exposing how these dynamics are both generated and perpetuated (Lissillour & Bonet Fernandez, 2021). By revealing how specific interests, social conventions and institutional arrangements collude to create power imbalances while simultaneously stifling dissenting voices and alternative viewpoints, the critical perspective strives to establish an environment conducive to the open discussion and equitable resolution of conflicts among diverse groups. Future studies may focus on identifying the type of performative acts that enable practitioners to reconfigure "agencements" despite power struggles and institutional constraints (Ouahab & Maclouf, 2020). Translations of critical SCS studies into real practical change are rarely found in the literature and should be a priority in future research. To proceed this way, researchers may engage in collective research with all relevant stakeholders by enacting effective boundary-spanning and reflexivity competence (Beaulieu, Rebolledo, & Lissillour, 2023).

For any of these theories in the *continuum*, there is a possibility to follow a three-step structure to study SCS practice. Such a structure was developed recently by Lissillour et al. (2023) and includes:

- (1) *gaining access to practices*. This step is often challenging because practitioners may be busy, not interested in academic research and reluctant to share information and let an outsider observe them. Nonetheless, this step is key because practitioners are those who enact, reproduce, transfer and sometimes create new practices;
- (2) *understanding the dispositional logic of practices*. To follow this step, it becomes necessary to comprehend how a particular practice or bundle of practice impacts intra and interorganizational interactions. The exploration of practical logics can be achieved through various methods, which are combined to enhance the interpretive inference of practical logics. For example, participant observation enables researchers to get closely acquainted with the political processes as they

watch practitioners act and deal with puzzles as they occur. In so doing, researchers connect the mundane details that make up and affect sustainable change in supply chains; and

- (3) *constructing the positional logic of practices*. It plays a vital role in research which involves interpreting the intersubjective rules of engagement and mapping the distribution of resources among participants (Lissillour & Bonet Fernandez, 2018).

While diverse research approaches are adopted by practice scholars, these three dimensions provide a foundation for studying SCS practices.

6. Discussion and conclusion

Grounded on a conceptual argumentation, this article identifies the potential of a *practice turn* in SCS studies, which requires a more extended use of TPs in this field. Practice theories blur the empirical boundaries between environmental studies, supply chain studies and political studies thus creating a space for dialogue between disciplines. Therefore, we argue for an interdisciplinary approach in which social practices (following Gherardi, 2009a) are integrated using multiple foci, such as agency, materiality, discourse and a certain critical stance. The practice turn as described in this paper is likely to contribute to the literature by providing theoretical and methodological concepts that enable researchers to disrupt the status quo. Therefore, through this article, we respond to a recent call for more engaged studies for scholars and practitioners of the supply chain (Touboullic et al., 2020; Touboullic & McCarthy, 2020).

Our theoretical implications lie in the explicit reflection of the relevance not only of companies and managers for SCS but also of what is in between in terms of hidden elements (e.g. knowing and learning). This perspective aligns with Gold & Schleper (2017) who required further studies beyond the instrumental approach. This paper, therefore, underlines the critical stance of the practice theories, which values the researcher's reflexivity to renew scientific practices. Such a perspective demonstrates methodological implications in valuing alternative methods to study practice. For instance, ethnography is a rich methodology that can generate great insights into sustainability practices (Glover & Touboullic, 2020). This methodology was recently mobilized by Santos et al. (2023), who investigated subsuppliers' ways of learning for SCS practice. Ethnography on SCS can deliver innovative insights by representing the existence of a *practice turn*.

Completing the *practice turn*, that is the inclusion of practice theory-based research in mainstream SCS studies, will generate additional theoretical contributions to SCS. Thus, we argue that the epistemological perspectives offered by the *continuum* contribute to the *practice turn* in SCS studies. This broad understanding of TPs contributes to the *practice turn* by enabling scholars to benefit from "learning from a pluralist epistemological perspective" (Lam, 2000). By highlighting that TPs adopt divergent epistemological stances, we do not intend to create a clear separation between them, but rather to stress that the idiosyncratic nature of practice is reflected in the multiple theoretical perspectives that coexist along an epistemological *continuum*. The research venues based on each TP suggest different types of potential contributions that will, similarly to prior practice-based studies in SCS, generate additional understanding compared to studies geared by mainstream approaches.

Practical implications also emerged from our theoretical elaboration. By using the perspective of practice, managers can recognize that not only explicit elements matter but also those hidden. As explored by Fritz et al. (2022), managers should identify not only what the SCS practices are, and how they should be combined, but also why, where and by whom

should these practices be connected. Hence, managers can understand that people are important for SCS, but also their emotions and experiences while working with sustainability practice (Carmagnac & Naoui-Outini, 2022). Such a perspective shows that we should focus on a mindset change for sustainability, in which managers are not limited to tangible elements. In addition, social implications emerge when the *practice turn* open doors for future studies that will target grand challenges in new ways. The challenges of the 21st century is not limited to economic and political crises but are directly related to global warming and climate changes in which peoples' vulnerability will increase exponentially.

As with any academic research, we are not immune to limitations. Due to its conceptual nature, we highlight that empirical development is needed to advance our comprehension of the *practice turn*. A better alignment between epistemologies, theories and methodologies will support the advancement of our argumentation and a better representation of our main insights. By showing previous literature, we demonstrate that a *practice turn* has a high potential in SCS studies and will emerge when scholars assume their role for SCS being more related to practice than having an excessive focus on economic matters. Our research agenda provided in Table 1 opens doors for future studies to advance and strengthen the possibility of a *practice turn*. However, we understand that other elements of practice were not covered in this research, such as community of practice (Brown & Duguid, 1991) and theory of activity (Malik et al., 2019). Future studies must advance our knowledge of SCS practice by exploring the other aspects of SCS that have been not yet studied.

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Data availability statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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